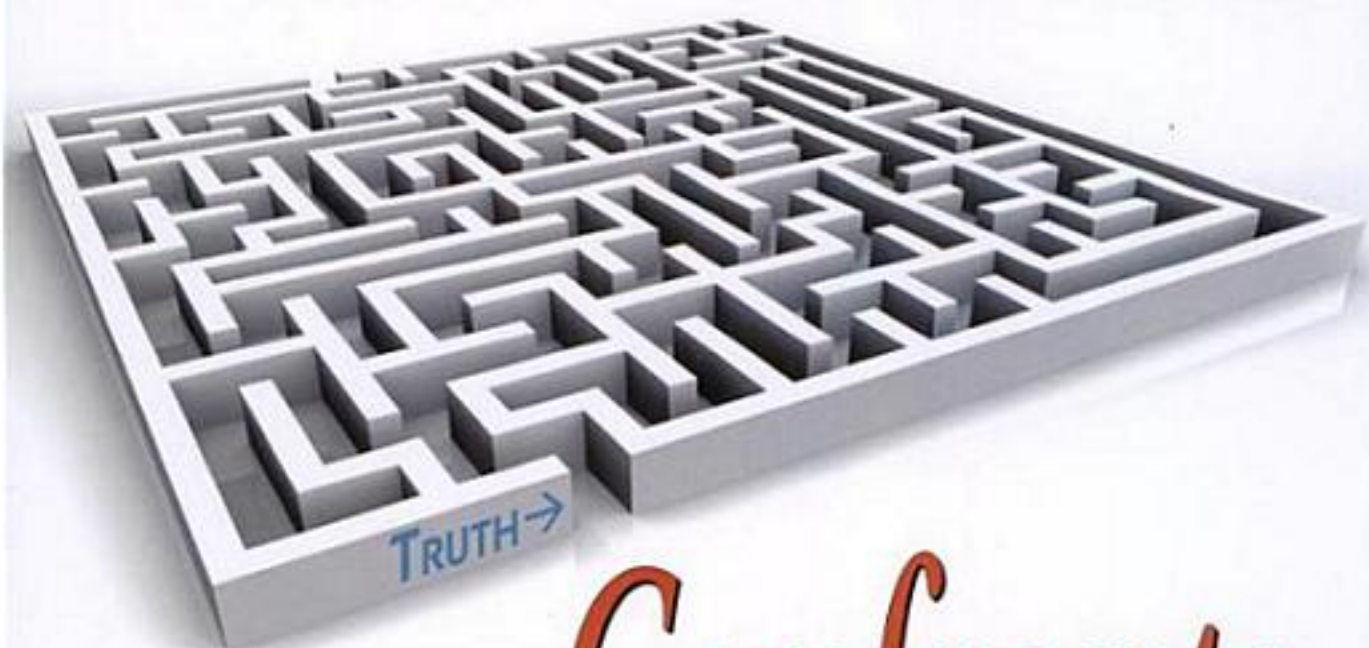


The General Conference



Confronts Apostasy

Russell R. Standish
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Russell R. Standish, Colin D. Standish
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Contents

PART I

THE ROAD TO A FAITHLESS FAITH

1. The Crucial Value of Church History	9
2. Our Church, Oh, Our Church	15
3. Nostalgia	23

PART II

MATTERS OF SERIOUS CONSIDERATION

4. A Crucial Principle	37
5. The New Theology Introduced	45
6. The Tyranny of Tolerance	53
7. Placing Our Faith in Religious Leaders	59

PART III

OFF-SHOOTS

8. The Messenger Party	73
9. The Marion Party	83
10. The Holy Flesh Movement	89
11. The Alpha of Apostasy	101
12. The Living Temple	115
13. Davidian Seventh-day Adventists	125

PART IV

THE 1888 MINNEAPOLIS

GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

14. Defending Truth to the Point of Error	133
15. A Search for Truth Marshals Opposition to Truth	141
16. The 1888 Message	155
17. Minneapolis and the Human Nature of Christ	167
18. Disharmony	177

19. Complexity	187
20. Dr. Waggoner's Downward Course	205
21. Dr. Waggoner's Departure from Seventh-day Adventism	215
22. The Final Chapter in the Life of Elder Jones	223
23. Our Name	237
24. The Rejection of the 1888 Message	243
25. Holding Back the 1888 Message	255

PART V

AN HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATION

26. Church Organization Prior to 1903	265
27. Kingly Power Surfaces	273
28. Denominationalism	285
29. Taking the Authoritative Road	295
30. In Matters of Conscience	303
31. Hierarchicalism in the Decade of the 1890s	313
32. Limitation of Administrative Control	321
33. The 1901 General Conference Session	329
34. The Lead-up to the 1903 General Conference Session	343
35. The 1903 General Conference Session	357

PART VI

ANTAGONISM TO SELF-SUPPORTING WORK

36. God's Self-Supporting Work and Finance	369
37. Further Tensions Between the General Conference and Madison	383
38. Counsels to a New General Conference Leader	391
39. Sister White Speaks Out on Self-Supporting Work	405

PART VII

MILITARY SERVICE—WORLD WAR I

40. God's Counsel at Times of War	423
41. The Case of Christen Rassmussen	433
42. Non-Combatancy	443

43. World War I	451
44. The General Conference Response	459
45. Seventh-day Adventist Response to Coercive Regimes	475
46. The Tyranny of Tolerance in War	485
47. Providential Reprieves	491
48. Trials Endured	501
49. German Church Elders Protest	513
50. The 1914 Change of Policy to War	521

PART VIII

THE 1919 BIBLE CONFERENCE

51. Administrators, Editors, and Academics	
Evaluate the Spirit of Prophecy	537
52. Doubts and More Doubts	551
53. The Doubts Mount	561
54. The Great Controversy Attacked	577

PART IX

EARLY SOVIET COMMUNISM

PRIOR TO WORLD WAR II

55. The Russian Revolution and Seventh-day Adventism	595
--	---------------------

Index of Scripture Quotations	607
Index of Spirit of Prophecy Quotations	611
Index of Topics	615
Index of Institutions and Personalities	617
Hartland Publications Book List	619
Seventh-day Adventist History Octet	638
Meet the Authors	639

CHAPTER 9

The Marion Party

In 1858, Gilbert Cranmer, who was desirous of receiving a license to preach, was denied it. He was informed that two conditions were to be met before he could be licensed. The first of these was that he must correct some unspecified family matters, and the second that he must cease the use of tobacco. Disgruntled by this rebuff, and unwilling to meet these conditions, Gilbert Cranmer disassociated himself from the small group of Seventh-day Adventists, never again to walk with them.

Cranmer entered into a self-supporting preaching ministry and gathered a small number of supporters among Seventh-day Adventists. The *Messenger of Truth* periodical, formerly published by the Messenger Party, had become defunct and, in 1863, Cranmer's group revived it under a new title—*The Hope of Israel*.

It is not surprising that the magazine only endured for two years, failing for lack of financial support, since the chief emphasis of the magazine was the "liberty" to use tobacco and to indulge in some other practices frowned upon by the growing body of Seventh-day Adventists. Such a magazine was far from edifying.

Gilbert Cranmer hardly possessed the courage and fidelity of his namesake, Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury, who was burnt at the stake in Oxford during the reign of "bloody" Queen Mary I (1516-1558; Queen of England 1553-1558).

In 1865, Elder B. F. Snook and Elder W. H. Brinkerhoff agitated opposition to Elder and Sister James White. Both held positions of responsibility in the Iowa Conference. Elder Snook was the president and Elder Brinkerhoff was the Secretary-Treasurer. They were both relatively new Seventh-day Adventists, having embraced our faith in 1860. Elder Snook, a former Methodist and Elder Brinkerhoff, a qualified lawyer, took issue with the method of church organization which had been adopted in 1863 when the General Conference was first organized. Both favored a rather loose organizational structure, more akin to the Congregational Church.

Because of his dissident activities, Elder Snook was replaced as president of the Iowa Conference in 1865 by Elder George Ide Butler (1834-1918). This was a stepping stone to Elder Butler's appointment as president of the General Conference for two periods—1871-1874 and 1880-1888.

Upon his replacement as Iowa Conference President, Elder Snook, supported by Elder Brinkerhoff, departed from the Seventh-day Adventist Church and set up a new organization in 1866 in Marion, Iowa, the town providing its name to this offshoot group. It was to this group that Gilbert Cranmer and his small group drifted.

The Marion Party adopted the denominational name of Church of God (Adventist). Headquarters were established in Stanbury, Missouri. While retaining Sabbath observance, they differed in their understanding of the Millennium, favoring an earthly millennium at which time, with Christ's presence upon the earth, all mankind would be converted. They promoted the keeping of the Old Testament Feast Days and advanced the unscriptural notion that Christ died on Wednesday and arose on Sabbath afternoon, having spent seventy-two hours, three full days and nights, in Joseph's tomb. (See our book *Winds of Doctrine* for discussion of the Feast Days and the Wednesday Crucifixion, and our book *The Rapture, the End Times and the Millennium* for an examination of the Biblical truth of the Millennium.)

In 1933 an off-shoot of this church formed, adopting the name Church of God (Seventh Day). When this group merged once more with their mother church in 1949, the name of the off-shoot group was ad-

opted for the entire church with headquarters in Salem, West Virginia.

W. W. Armstrong was first a member and pastor of the Church of God (Adventist) and then the off-shoot, The Church of God (Seventh Day). He later severed his connection with both and commenced the Radio Church of God with headquarters in Pasadena, California. This church was later renamed The Worldwide Church of God.

After W. W. Armstrong's death, the Worldwide Church of God split into a modernist group which regarded Sabbath-keeping as legalistic, and promoted no specific day of worship, and a group which retained the principle of Sabbath-keeping.

But even the "Sabbath-keepers" did not keep that day holy. We know of one member in New Zealand who spent Sabbath afternoons drinking beer while watching the rugby union football matches on television. Sabbath shopping is permitted. Russell attended a funeral conducted by a Worldwide Church of God pastor. During refreshments at the conclusion of the service, the pastor drank liberally of the alcoholic beverages provided.

In the experience of the Marion Party we see once more the emerging principles of distrust in the prophetic gift of Sister White and the failure to grasp the sanctuary message. These matters have ever been central to off-shoots from our church. Leadership did not support these views and thus the damage inflicted upon the faith was minimal.

Elders Snook and Brinkerhoff's objection to the new organization was a belief in a form of congregationalism where each congregation was independent of the rest of the body of believers. When this concept of organization failed, the archdeceiver, in 1903, found far more success in introducing its antithesis, an hierarchical form of church governance akin to that of the Roman Catholic Church. We will study this matter later in this book. (See Part V—An Hierarchical Organization)

After Elder and Sister White had discussions with these leaders of the Iowa Conference, both confessed their error. Elder Snook completed his published confession with the words,

I also entreat my brethren and sisters in Iowa to forgive me for taking these things to them and thereby in-

fluencing them to wrong feelings. I do most sorrowfully repent of this grievous wrong, and pray that God and my brethren may forgive me. (*Review and Herald*, July 25, 1865)

Elder Brinkerhoff completed his confession,

And let me here say that my experience, though a sad one, has taught me that to doubt this truth, and the instrumentalities used to bring it out by the Lord, is to speedily lead one into the enemy's dark dominions, where he can be taken captive at his will. (*Ibid.*)

However, the repentance of each man, although nobly expressed, was short-lived. By the American Spring of 1866 they had gathered forty-five of the sixty members of the Marion Seventh-day Adventist Church to their cause.

Elder J. N. Loughborough years later reported upon the subsequent lives of Pastors Snook and Brinkerhoff.

The career of these two men among Sabbath-keeping opponents was quite limited. The new departure in the "independence of the churches" [congregationalism] did not "pan out" as they expected. . . . Before many months elapsed, both S.[nook] and B.[rinkerhoff] dropped their interest in the [Advent and Sabbath] Advocate [their magazine], and gave up the keeping of the Sabbath. Brinkerhoff engaged in school teaching, and the study of law. Snook engaged in preaching universalism, at a salary of \$1000 a year. (*Pacific Union Recorder*, January 9, 1913)

Later, some of the leaders in the Marion Movement repented of their error, but tragically not unto salvation. W. H. Brinkerhoff was present at the baptism in 1876 of a young man in Iowa, George Burt Starr (1854-

1944), who later was sent as a missionary to Australia. After the baptism, W. H. Brinkerhoff stated to the young George Starr,

“I am glad to see you take your stand with these people. They have the truth and I am sorry I ever left them. It is too late for me now to join them. I have opposed them, and have trained my family in that opposition.” . . . And then in sadness he said, “I am a lost man.” (*Pacific Union Recorder*, January 9, 1913)

Another leader in the Marion Party was William Long. Elder J. S. Rouse, a former president of the Michigan Conference, offered a copy of *Life Sketches* to William Long. He read Sister White’s life and experience and said,

“We have been fighting a good woman and a good work.” (*Ellen G. White Document File 503a “Some History and Some Information Regard the Church of God”* pp. 23, 24)

Sister Long, upon overhearing her husband’s words and with her eyes full with tears, commented,

“Oh, the thousands of dollars we have put into this movement and it is lost. We have made a mistake. If we had only done as Brother and Sister White wanted us to. They were here and pleaded with us, but we would not listen to them. We were stubborn. Oh, the money we have wasted!” (*Ibid.*)

William Long’s evaluation was different from his wife’s. it was even more tragic. Calling her “Mother” he stated,

“Mother, don’t talk about the thousands of dollars. This is nothing. I care not for that. But when a man comes to my position, and my age and realizes that he

has wasted his life, thrown it away, that is what worries me.” (*Ibid.*)

What a lesson there is here for those who launch into an off-shoot against God’s truth. The remorse of the Longs and Mr. Brinkerhoff upon this earth is minor when compared with that which will be expressed by those facing eternal oblivion after the second resurrection.